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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9660
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0339
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA 0158
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 1196
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1198
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1326
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1730
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1036
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, PRM/AFR
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: LIMITED UNHCR ACCESS TO ERITREAN ASYLUM
SEEKERS

REF: A. SECSTATE 67937
[1](#)B. CAIRO 1258

Classified by Minister Counselor for Economic and Political
Affairs William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On June 23, we again pressed MFA Deputy Assistant
Minister for Refugees Tarek El Maaty for the GOE to cease
forced repatriations of Eritrean asylum seekers and to allow
UNHCR complete access to those held in Egyptian custody. El
Maaty, uncomfortable and defensive, stressed that most of the
Eritreans were not genuine refugees but rather fleeing from
military service, "which would be a crime in Egypt." He
again portrayed the issue as one of "national security" and
lamented that so few other countries were willing to "help us
share the burden."

[1](#)2. (C) El Maaty criticized the UNHCR for not tackling the
problem with the requisite alacrity or adequate resources,
but admitted when pressed that the UNHCR had requested access
to detained Eritreans "for months." He said that the UNHCR
now has access to about 200 Eritreans in two locations near
Aswan and promised that Egypt would allow anyone the UNHCR
designates to be a genuine refugee to stay in Egypt. He
denied knowledge of any other Eritreans in Egypt, but
acknowledged that there might be "some" held by the security
forces in other locations.

[1](#)3. (C) On June 24, UNHCR Deputy Regional Representative for
Protection Katharina Lumpp told us that the UNHCR does have
access to almost 200 Eritrean asylum seekers held near Aswan
for refugee status determinations, and that she expected
processing to be completed by June 29 at the latest.
However, she said that the GOE has denied UNHCR access to
Eritreans reported to be held elsewhere in Egypt until the
UNHCR completes processing in Aswan; "'we'll see' is all they
told us." Lumpp said that the problem is not one of UNHCR's
capacity; they have another team ready to deploy elsewhere in
Egypt concurrent with the team in Aswan.

[1](#)4. (U) Also on June 24, the MFA issued a statement on its web
site "severely criticizing" western countries for criticizing
Egypt on the Eritrean refugee issue while at the same time
declining to resettle Eritreans themselves, to the point of
"humiliating" asylum seekers. Egypt, the statement says, is
seriously trying to balance its security needs and its
international obligations.

[1](#)5. (SBU) On June 25, Lumpp opined that between 100 and 200

Eritreans likely remained in Egyptian prisons in locations other than Aswan, but said that "it's very difficult to tell." "Reliable sources" had told her that, at least sometime in the past week, about 100 Eritreans were in a prison in Borg Al Arab near Alexandria and that about 40 were either in or being moved from Kanater prison in Cairo. She noted that, prior to the repatriations, the UNHCR had repeatedly sent the Egyptian authorities the names of about 1400 Eritreans to which the UNHCR was requesting access. Even after eliminating potential duplicate names, Lumppp said that the UNHCR had expected to eventually find at least 1200 Eritreans in Egyptian custody if none had been deported.

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